

Anamnesis Of The Departed

ANAMNESIS OF THE DEPARTED

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Introduction

The word “**Anamnesis**” is derived from the Greek word *ἀνάμνησις*. (**Henry Gorge Liddell, Robert Scoot 1940**) “**Ana**” means again or back, and “**mnesis**” means memory or remembering. When we combine these terms, it gives the meaning “to remember again” or “to bring back into memory”. Anamnesis means remembrance, but not in the way our mind simply recalls memories. In theology, especially in the Divine Liturgy, it is a living remembrance. It refers to making present something that happened in the past. The Orthodox Church practices anamnesis in a profound way. For example, through the Eucharist, the Nativity, the Passion, the Resurrection of Christ, and also the lives of saints and the departed faithful, the Church makes these sacred events present through her Divine Liturgy . The word “Departed” has a Latin root, “**dispartio**,” which means someone who has passed away (**Oxford University Press, 1993**). “**Departed**” is a respectful way of saying “dead.” In theological context, however, when we say departed, we refer to our brothers and sisters who have fallen asleep not in their souls, but in their bodies and who have now entered into the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. Theologically speaking, when we speak

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of the Anamnesis of the Departed, we are referring to a living remembrance of those who have fallen asleep in the flesh. In Orthodox teaching, death affects only the body, not the soul. The soul is an immortal being, and at the moment of death it passes into the presence of its Creator. There, the soul remains in the heavenly realm, awaiting the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. As saint Basil the Great says :

“The soul does not die with the body, nor is it dissolved together with it;

it remains living and conscious, awaiting the judgment of the Lord.”

(Saint Basil the Great 1993)

Based on these teachings of Saint Basil, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church affirms and preaches that the human soul is eternal. We also see this reflected in the writings of Saint Paul, particularly in 2 Timothy 1:16–18, where he prays for ***Onesiphorus***, who had already departed. In light of this apostolic witness, the Church received and preserved the practice as part of her Holy Tradition, continuing to pray for the faithful who have fallen asleep. In the liturgical prayers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the departed are referred to as “**ሰዎች / ሰዎች**”, meaning “those who have fallen asleep.” (**ሰዎች ሰዎች *The liturgy of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido church 2003***) The Church uses the term “sleep” to describe the death of the body, not the death of the soul. This stands in contrast to the Old Testament understanding, where death was often feared and associated

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with separation from God. In Orthodox teaching, however, physical death is seen as the temporary sleep of the flesh, while the soul remains alive in God's presence. However, for those who are unfamiliar with the apostolic teaching and the ancient practice of the Church, the concept of the "***Anamnesis of the Departed***" may appear unnecessary or even foolish. This misunderstanding is not new; even in the early Church, groups such as the Eunomians and certain Gnostics rejected prayers for the departed. Church Fathers like St. John Chrysostom and St. Jerome argued strongly against these views, defending the Church's apostolic tradition. Among various Protestant groups today, a similar misunderstanding persists, largely because they do not preserve the early Church's practice of praying for the departed. Without the apostolic context, the spiritual depth of this remembrance is easily overlooked.

Concept of Departed in Orthodoxy

The concept of the departed arises when a human being has passed away. From a scientific perspective, the departed refers to the body when the

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organs cease functioning and the biological systems shut down completely.

Philosophy, however, invites us to look beyond the material body.

Philosophers ask: What makes a person truly “exist”? Is it only the body, or is there something immaterial a consciousness or soul that continues beyond death? From this viewpoint, death is not simply the cessation of physical processes; it is the transition of the person’s essence or soul into another state of being.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, death is not seen as a threat. In contrast, for the people of the Old Testament, death was often terrifying because they could not be certain whether even the righteous would enter heaven. As the scholar Tertullian observed :

“For them, death was a wall that separated humanity from God, but our Lord Jesus Christ has broken that wall and built a bridge, so that we may pass safely through it. (On the Resurrection 1883)”

Likewise, Saint Paul declares,

**“O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” 1
Corinthian15:55.**

Orthodox Christians, we understand death as a passage that brings us closer to Christ, not as something chaotic or fearful, contrary to what our flesh may suggest.

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The main goal of the Orthodox Christian life is to attain theosis — union with God. We pursue theosis by imitating Christ, and Saint Paul gives us a model when he says,

“Imitate me as I imitate Christ” 1 Corinthians 11:1.

He also reminds us, ***“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” phillpians 1:21.*** By following Christ’s example, we learn that living in Him is true life, and even in death, the soul enters into His presence, participating fully in the divine life.

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The Divine Liturgy embraces the fullness of creation and salvation: one God, two natures in Christ (divine and human), and the threefold order of creation. Through the Divine Liturgy, these realities are united, with God at the center of His special revelation. This union also extends to the faithful who have fallen asleep, bringing them into the living remembrance and spiritual communion of the Church. By including the saints martyrs, church fathers, apostles, and prophets.

In this liturgy, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church prays for the departed name by name as well as offering general prayers for all who have fallen asleep.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, each Christian is given a name at baptism. This name continues to be used throughout the person’s

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life, especially during the sacraments, including baptism, repentance, and marriage. The same name is also used when an Orthodox Christian has passed away. During the Divine Liturgy, the officiating priest begins prayers by calling the departed by name, asking God to grant His mercy upon them, in the same spirit as Saint Paul's prayers for the faithful.

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From the very beginning of the Divine Liturgy, the Anamnesis of the departed including them in prayer demonstrates the significant place they hold within the life of the Church.

In addition to praying for the departed by name, the Church also offers general prayers for all who have fallen asleep. Through these prayers, the faithful ask God to grant them a place in heaven, a realm of perfect peace and communion with Him. This practice reflects the Orthodox understanding that death is not the end, but a passage into God's eternal presence. By including both specific and general prayers, the Church manifests her care for every soul, affirming that all who have departed in faith remain part of the living Body of Christ. These prayers serve as a spiritual bridge, uniting the Church on earth with those who have gone before, and expressing the hope that all may share in the fullness of divine

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life and eternal rest. By saying this on the Divine liturgy the church
Anamnesis the departed:

“ἡμεῖς οὖν ὡς ἐκείνους ἐκείνους ὡς ἐκείνους ὡς ἐκείνους ὡς ἐκείνους” (The Divine liturgy of EOTC 2003)⁷

Specifically Remembrance of the “Faithfulls”

A Christian, by professing their faith in Christ as the Son of the living God, follows the example of Saint Peter, who boldly declared this truth in Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:16). This confession of faith forms the foundation upon which the Church is built, and it is also the foundation upon which each believer’s personal faith should rest. Believing in Christ as the Son of the living God marks the Christian as one who stands in the true and direct faith. When a faithful Christian passes away holding this belief, the Church commemorates them in her prayers, acknowledging their steadfastness in the faith and asking God to grant them mercy and a place among the righteous. Through these prayers, the Church honors those who remained faithful to Christ during their earthly lives and unites them spiritually with the living community of believers. The church Reminds those who doesn’t go with the heresy against Christ by saying just like this two:

“ἡμεῖς οὖν ὡς ἐκείνους ἐκείνους ὡς ἐκείνους ὡς ἐκείνους ὡς ἐκείνους” (The Divine liturgy of EOTC 2003)⁸

“ ὡς ἐκείνους ὡς ἐκείνους ὡς ἐκείνους ὡς ἐκείνους ὡς ἐκείνους ὡς ἐκείνους” (the divine liturgy of EOTC)⁹

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to live in readiness and holiness. Every liturgical act, every prayer for the departed, and every sacrament points toward this ultimate fulfillment. In the Day of Parousia, the Church expects the resurrection of all who have fallen asleep, the perfect union of the faithful with Christ, and the consummation of God's promises. Thus, the hope of Parousia is not merely future-oriented; it shapes the present life of the Church, inspiring believers to live in faith, love, and anticipation of eternal communion with God.

Conclusion

The remembrance of the departed in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is an ancient, apostolic practice. It expresses the Church's belief

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that death does not break the bond between the faithful. In Christ, the living and the departed remain united, and the Divine Liturgy makes this unity visible through prayer, remembrance, and hope in the resurrection.

Throughout history, some groups rejected this teaching. Early heretical movements like the Gnostics and Eunomians denied the true resurrection and therefore considered prayers for the departed unnecessary.

The Church Fathers firmly defended the tradition:. Jerome affirmed that praying for the departed has been practiced ***“from the earliest times,”*** (*Against Vigilantius* 1983) and St. John Chrysostom taught that these prayers bring real spiritual benefit, showing love that continues beyond death. Today, similar misunderstandings appear among some Protestant denominations who do not preserve apostolic liturgy. Without the ancient context, the Anamnesis of the Departed may seem foolish to them, just as it did to earlier heresies. Yet the Orthodox Church continues this practice because it reflects the faith of Scripture, the Fathers, and the unbroken tradition of the Church.

In the EOTC, remembering the departed is not merely a ritual—it is a confession of our belief in the resurrection, our hope in the Parousia, and our love for the faithful who have fallen asleep in Christ. Through this remembrance, the Church proclaims that death has been conquered and that all who rest in the Lord await the glorious day when He will raise them in eternal life.

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